In a trilateral meeting held between India, Afghanistan and Iran on 4-5 January, 2003 at Tehran to discuss the development of transit and transport between the three countries, a Memorandum of Understanding on the Development and Construction of Transit and Transport Infrastructures in Chabahar-Mailak-Zaranj-Delaram route had been signed between the three countries aimed at improving access to Afghanistan, and upgrading the infrastructure at Chabahar port and relevant road segments. During the visit of President of Afghanistan, H.E. Mr. Hamid Karzai to India, in March this year, Prime Minister announced a financial commitment of US$70 million for the construction of Zaranj-Delaram road in Afghanistan.

A detailed technical survey of the Zaranj-Delaram road stretch has been completed by Border Roads Organization. Implementation will commence after the report on the execution of the project has been approved by the Government from the technical and financial angles.

Observation of Protest day by officers in RPOs

2008. SHRI GAYA SINGH:
SHRI V.V. RAGHAVAN:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the officers in the Regional Passport Offices all over the country observed a protest day by working an extra day on Saturday, the 31st May, 2003 to press for their demands; and

(b) if so, the details of their demands and the Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) and (b) As part of the strike threat issued by the All India Passport Employees Association (AIPEA), some of its members observed a protest day by working on Saturday, May 31, 2003. The AIPEA is an association of non-gazetted employees of the Central Passport Organisation (CPO) and does not have offices of the CPO on its membership.

2. The AIPEA has gone on strike on several occasions since its recognition in 1998. The agitation in May, 2003 had its origin in the refusal of the AIPEA to allow transfer of its members on the basis of

orders issued in April 2003. AIPEA added several other demands subsequently relating to cadre review, departmental promotional committee meetings, formation of a Departmental Council, foreign postings, uniform office procedure, provision of uniforms, transfer matters, passport printing work, revision of recruitment rules and regularization of casual workers. Action had been taken or is being taken in these areas. There are also issues which require consideration by other Ministries/Departments. On a number of areas, action is pending on the part of AIPEA.

3. In certain areas, such as cadre review and uniform office procedure, the attention of the office-bearers of AIPEA had been drawn to the fact that it would be difficult to make progress on these two matters unless the passport employees met the Staff Inspection Unit (SIU) productivity norms established by the Ministry of Finance. The AIPEA has consistently not accepted the SIU norms. This has been a major factor leading to considerable pendencies in the issue of passports in almost all Passport Offices and the resultant dissatisfaction of the passport seeking public.

4. In regard to transfer matters, the AIPEA has been insisting on transfer only within limited zones which are highly unviable. This has resulted in overstaffing insome Passport Offices' as well as understaffing in other Passport Offices. This factor has also led to a further increase in pendencies in issue of passports. It may be mentioned that in the case of the Regional Passport Office in Ahmedabad there are only 82 employees against the sanctioned strength of 134. As a result of this severe shortage of staff and the non-acceptance of SIU norms by the AIPEA, the pendency in the issuance of passports is more than 90,000 in RPO Ahmedabad. AIPEA has been asked to submit a proposal for the introduction of new and more flexible zones for tranfer of employees.

5. On a number of occasions in the past AIPEA has given assurances to the Ministry that all pendencies would be cleared in specific time frame and maintained at zero level. However, this has not happended and pendencies are instead increasing. It may be further mentioned that AIPEA in disregard of the Conduct Rules has gone on strike and go-slow and other forms of agitation. In addition to such action taken by AIPEA being illegal, the agitations of AIPEA have also severely hampered

the work of Passport Offices and has resulted in falls in the output of Passport Offices, dissatisfaction among the passport seeking public, and projected the Passport Offices in a negative light to the general public. The unhelpful activities of the AIPEA is a major impediment to the public obtaining passports when the possession of passport is a basic right for all citizens of the country. The Government have nevertheless consistently taken a positive and constructive approach in its dealings with AIPEA as a result of which, the agitation in May 2003 was called off by the AIPEA on May 31, 2003.

Technocrats and IT experts for China

2009. DR. AKHILESH DAS: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether during the recent visit of the Prime Minister to China the issues relating to professional services, including technocrats and Information Technology professionals were discussed; and

(b) if so, what possibilities for such professionals and technologists and job-seekers from India were explored as a result of these talks indicating the estimated potential demand for such job-seekers in China and the availability of such manpower in India?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) and (b) During Prime Minister's visit to China in June 2003, there was no discussion with the Chinese side on specific issues relating to professional services. However, both sides agreed to cooperate in the field of Information Technology.

H-1B Visas to IT professionals

2010. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA:
SHRI RAMA MUNI REDDY SIRIGIREDDY:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of H-1B visas issued to the Indian IT professional by the USA during the last five years, year-wise;

(b) whether it is a fact that there is a drastic reduction in the issuance of H-1B visas to our IT professionals;